

# History of Ireland.

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## *History of Ireland previous to The Conquest by The Normans*

### CHAPTER I.

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#### Ireland as known to The Greeks and Romans.

WHEN we carry our inquiries far back into the history of most modern nations, we arrive eventually at a period when the materials of history become so rare and indistinct, that it is necessary to arrange and classify them with more than ordinary care and minuteness, and even after that classification, they afford only a weak and doubtful light. These materials, however, are naturally separated most authentic of all, they tell but half their story without written documents, and it is only by a careful collation with the similar monuments of other peoples, in different circumstances, that we obtain, to a certain extent, a view of the domestic manners, the national habits, and the state of civilization, of the particular people to whom they belonged. The third class of materials, which is much less to be depended upon than the others, is far more copious and attractive ; it consists of the historical traditions of a much later age, which are at best kept perfectly distinct from each other. We have, first, the accounts given by contemporary writers of other countries, then in a more advanced state of civilization ; these are the most valuable materials, but they are more or less copious according to a variety of circumstances. In the absence of written documents belonging to the people whose history we are treating, we have the numerous and various articles which they made and used arms, and domestic implements, and personal ornaments, yielded up to us by the earth on which they trod, and found more especially in their graves. The comparison of these articles, which form our second class of materials, is the more special province of the archaeologist ; although most authentic of all, they tell but half the story without written documents. The third class of materials, which is much less to be depended upon than the others, is far more copious and attractive ; it consists of the historical traditions of a much later age, which are at best but the work of poets and minstrels, though they form the earlier part of the written annals of all countries.

It is necessary, for the interest of truth, to consider each of these classes of materials separately. The two first assist each other mutually, because they are contemporary and truth-telling monuments ; but the third belongs to the romance of history, and the indiscreet adoption of it has chiefly given its character to what is commonly called the mythic period of the history of nations.

The early allusions to Ireland found in the classic writers of antiquity are extremely vague : with them this island of the far west stood somewhat in the same position, in a geographical point of view, as that held in modern times by Patagonia or any other extreme point, visited occasionally by the mariner in search of water or traffic, but as yet only partially explored. The earliest geographical notions of the Greeks are found in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, and more especially in that singular cycle of romance which celebrated the expedition of the Argonauts, the oldest account of

which is found in a poem published under the name of the fabulous Orpheus, and believed to have been written about five hundred years before Christ. The geographical knowledge possessed by the Greeks at this period was confined within a very limited circle. Italy was its boundary to the west, and they believed that the Euxine opened to the north into the ocean which encircled the whole earth. According to the poem just alluded to, the Argonauts passed from the Pontus Euxinus into the northern ocean, here called the Cronian Sea, and after a variety of adventures, they arrived at islands (for the name is used in the plural as well as in the singular,) named Iernides, situated on the Atlantic ocean, and which can only apply to the two islands of Great Britain and Ireland. The adventurers are here overtaken by a violent storm, which carries them out into the ocean, and after escaping various perils, they at length reach in safety the pillars of Hercules, and enter the Mediterranean. A hundred and fifty years later, about the middle of the fourth century before Christ, Aristotle, in his treatise de Mundo, speaks almost as vaguely as his predecessors, of the two large islands in the western ocean, called “the British Isles,” and consisting of Albion and Ierne.

Long before this period the Phœnicians of Syria had become the merchants of the world ; they were establishing their colonies along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and their voyages extended beyond the straits to the south and north far along the coasts of Africa and Europe. They visited the British isles at an early period, allured thither by the valuable metals found in them, and it was no doubt to them that the Greeks owed their slight and vague knowledge of Ierne and Albion.

The next Greek writer who mentions Ierne is the geographer Strabo, who wrote about half a century before the birth of our Saviour. He tells us simply that this isle was situate on the other side of Britain, and that it was ill inhabited on account of the coldness of the climate. Strabo’s great contemporary, Julius Cæsar, the first Roman invader of Britain, tells us that Ireland is one-half less than its sister island, but confesses that he could gather no certain information relating to it. But in the middle of the first century of the Christian era, the Roman writers begin to show a better knowledge of this island, which Cæsar had already spoken of by its Latin name of Hibernia. Mela, still labouring under the prejudices of the Greeks, describes it as nearly equal in size to Britain, but he asserts that the severity of its climate hindered the fruits of the earth from coming to maturity, although its herbage was so luxuriant (“green Erin”) that it was necessary to allow the cattle only a short portion of the day for grazing, lest they should over-eat themselves. Strabo had expressed his opinion of the barbarism of the inhabitants of Ierne, by informing us that they eat human flesh, and that the sexes lived in promiscuous intercourse, without paying attention even to the ties of blood. Mela tells us that the Irish of his time were so uncivilized, that they were equally without sense of virtue or of religion ; and Solinus, who describes them as an inhospitable and war-like people, and gives several other instances of their barbarism, assures us that they made no distinction between right and wrong. Their cannibalism seems to have been almost proverbial ; it is alluded to by Diodorus Siculus ; and St. Jerome, at a much later period, declares that in his youth he had seen Scots or Irishmen exhibited in Gaul, eating human flesh.

But with the establishment of the Roman power in Britain, Ireland soon began to be better known to the Romans, not only through the communications which must always have existed between the two islands, but through the more general resort of merchants to its numerous ports. Tacitus describes it as being a smaller island than Britain, but as resembling it in climate and the character and manners of its inhabit-

ants, though he speaks of the comparison as unfavourable to the Irish. Its approaches and harbours, he says, were better known through the merchants who frequented them, than those of Britain. From this author we learn that the Irish were already weakened by those domestic feuds which have ever since proved their bane. One of the native chieftains, driven away in consequence of these feuds, had, in the year 82, taken shelter with Agricola, the Roman governor of Britain, who, at his suggestion, made preparations for the invasion of Ireland, in order to reduce it under the Roman yoke, which he was assured he might easily effect with a single legion and a few auxiliaries. Agricola had already made his preparations, and collected his army of invasion on the nearest coast of Britain, when he appears to have been called off from his design by affairs of still greater importance. The poverty of our information relating to the history of our island under the Romans, leaves it doubtful whether the Roman armies subsequently passed into Ireland or not ; but Juvenal, in a remarkable passage of his second satire, speaks of his countrymen as having carried their arms beyond the Irish shores. [1]

In the geographical tables of Ptolemy, published soon after the date of the two last-mentioned writers, about A.D. 120, Ireland is laid before our eyes in a more distinct form, and we are made acquainted with the principal points of the coasts, as well as the principal ports to which the merchants traded, the chief towns of the island, and the different tribes whose territories bordered on the sea. Ptolemy used chiefly the later Greek authorities, and he is believed to have derived his information relating to the western extremities of the world as then known, directly or indirectly, from the merchants who frequented them ; his account is the more worthy of our attention, as it forms the first authentic starting-point for the history of Ireland. [2]

This geographer, whose representation of the form of the island is much less incorrect than might be expected, begins his survey with the northern side, at what he calls the Northern Promontory or Cape, answering to a headland on the coast of Donegal, still known popularly as the North Cape. He proceeds thence to the east, to what he calls Cape Venicium, which perhaps answers to the modern Malin Head ; he then names in succession the mouths of two rivers, which he calls Vidua and Argita, supposed to be the Foyle and the Bann ; and he ends his description of this coast with Cape Robogdium, believed to be Fair-Head, in the vicinity of the Giant's Causeway. Two distinct tribes are mentioned by Ptolemy as occupying the country bordering on this line of coast, and giving their name to the extreme promontories, the Venicnii and the Robogdii ; the former inhabited the county of Donegal, the latter those of Londonderry and Antrim. Ptolemy knew of no town on this coast.

Proceeding along the western coast, from the northern cape, Ptolemy mentions first, the mouth of the river Ravius, supposed to be the modern Guibarra. A considerable town at which he next arrives, and which he calls Magnata, appears to answer to the site of Donegal. Then follow in succession five rivers, the Libnius (or, according to one editor, Libeius), answering probably to Sligo Bay ; the Ausoba, perhaps the bay of Killala ; the Senus, perhaps Clew or Newport Bay ; the Dur, which seems to answer to the bay of Galway ; and the Iernus, which there can be little doubt is the Shannon. Beyond these was the Southern Promontory, which is supposed to correspond with Dunmore Head. The tribes enumerated by Ptolemy as inhabiting this line of coast are the Erdini or Erpeditani, whose territory adjoined to that of the Venicnii ; the Magnatæ , who occupied the neighbourhood of Donegal, the site of their chief town, which took its ancient name from them ; the Auteri, who held the district extending from the county of Donegal to that of Sligo ; the Gangani, who

inhabited the county of Mayo; and the Velibori, or Ellebri, who held the district lying between Galway and the Shannon. The south-west part of the island, and a considerable part of the interior, was inhabited by the Iverni, who gave name not only to the great river, but to the whole island, and who may perhaps be considered as the aboriginal inhabitants.

Ptolemy gives no points on the south-western part of the island, the coast of the Iverni ; but he gives the bearings of two rivers on the south, the Dabrona, which seems to answer to Cork Harbour, (or to the Blackwater,) and the Birgus, the name and position of which coincide remarkably with those of the Barrow ; and then he takes us to Carnsore Point, which was then called the Holy Promontory. Two tribes inhabited the neighbourhood of the rivers noted by Ptolemy on this side of the island, the Usdiæ or Vodiæ (according to the variations of the manuscripts), in the modern counties of Waterford and Tipperary, and the Brigantes, in Wexford.

The eastern part of the island, separated from Britain by what Ptolemy calls the Ivernian ocean, contained more towns than either of the other three. The first place marked in proceeding north from the Holy Promontory, is the mouth of the river Modonus, supposed to be the Liffey ; close to it was the town of Manapia, which is believed to be Dublin ; then we are brought to the river Oboca, which is supposed to be the Boyne ; and then to another town called Eblana, which, from Ptolemy's calculations, is supposed by Mannert to have stood at or near Dundalk, and not to have been (as we should have guessed from the name) Dublin.<sup>[3]</sup> The mouth of another river, the Bubinda or Buvinda, appears to correspond with Carlingford Bay ; a cape called Isamnium answers to the modern Point St. John, forming the north-western extremity of Dundrum Bay ; and between this and Cape Robogdium are marked two other rivers, the Vinderius, probably the small river which runs into : Strangford Lough, and the Logia, the mouth of which seems to correspond with the bay of Carrickfergus. The tribes known to Ptolemy as inhabiting this coast, were (proceeding from the north) the Darini, immediately following the Robogdii, and occupying part of Antrim ; the Voluntii, or, according to other texts, the Usluntii, occupying the county of Down ; the Blanii or Eblani, who occupied the territory round the bay of Dundalk, and appear to have given name to their town, Eblana ; the Cauçi, on the banks of the Boyne ; the Manapii, occupying the county of Dublin ; and the Coriondi in Wicklow, between the Manapii and the Brigantes. The two names of tribes last mentioned prove that the south-east of Ireland had received its population from Britain.

Ptolemy has further given us the names and positions of seven towns in the interior of the island. The first of these he names Regia, which is probably a Latin name given to it as being the seat of one of the principal chiefs or reguli of Ireland ; it was situated in the north, probably in the neighbourhood of Omagh. Rhæba seems to have stood in the vicinity of Inniskillen, on the banks of Lough Erne. Laberus was probably in the county of Louth, not far from Ardee. Macolicum stood in the centre of the island, between Dublin and Galway, not far from Kilbeggan in Westmeath. Another Regia stood a little way inland from Killala Bay, but its exact position is uncertain. Dunum, the name of which is Celtic, and which was evidently a town of the Manapii, is believed to have stood some miles to the west of Dublin. Ivernus, or Iernis, the city of the great tribe of the Iverni, was probably not far from the modern Banagher, on the Shannon. From another part of Ptolemy's work, it would appear that Ivernus and Rhæba were the two most important towns in Ireland. The Latin name Regia occur-

ring twice, proves that Ptolemy's information was not, as some writers have supposed, taken merely from older Phœnician authorities.

At what time the migration of the Manapii and Brigantes to Ireland took place whether it preceded or followed the Roman invasion of Britain—we have now no means of deciding. There can be little doubt that the population of Ireland was at this time a mixture of races, and that new tribes were already overpowering the older lords of the soil. At some period, which is equally uncertain with the other early dates, but which appears to belong to the age of Roman rule in Britain, a race from the north, (probably Scandinavian,) the Scots, settled in the northern parts of Ireland, and soon made themselves so powerful, that Scots and Scotland were used for Irishman and Ireland. From the fourth century till the ninth or tenth, the Irish are almost always spoken of as Scots, and this use of the latter word has not unfrequently led more recent writers into serious mistakes. It is the generally received tradition, and we have no better authority to advance, that a colony of Irish Scots, about the beginning of the third century, established themselves in Caledonia, and formed a close alliance with the Picts, who appear to have been a kindred race, in their hostility against the Romanized Britons. In course of time, the name of Scots, lost in Ireland, was transferred to the whole population of North Britain.

Other northern people, among whom were the purer Teutonic race of the Saxons, who afterwards occupied so large a portion of Britain, joined in the attack to which the Roman province was exposed in the middle of the fourth century, until they were repressed by the energy of Theodosius, in the year 368. We are told by the Roman writer Ammianus Marcellinus, that the barbarians had overrun the whole of South Britain, and that Theodosius first encountered them under the walls of London. The Roman general, not content with expelling them from his province, followed them into their own fastnesses ; and on this occasion at least, the Roman fleet, in pursuit of the fugitives, seems to have paid a hostile visit to the coast of Ireland. [4] Unfortunately, no detailed account of these events has been preserved. The history of Roman Britain becomes now more indistinct and confused, and we can only trace in the dim light thrown over it by meagre or very doubtful authorities, that the Irish Scots joined in the tumults and ravages which were at last put an end to by the final supremacy of the Anglo-Saxons.

Such is all we learn concerning Ireland from the Greek and Roman writers, previous to the fifth century ; and it continued so little known to the rest of Europe, that Isidore of Seville, who wrote about the year 580, still takes his information from the older Roman geographers ; he tells us that Ireland is smaller than Britain, but from its position, more fertile ; that it was called Ibernia, because its southern shores looked to Spanish Iberia, and were washed by the waves of the Cantabrian ocean ; and that it was also named Scotia, from the Scots, by whom it was then inhabited ; and he adds, that the island contained no snakes or bees, and few birds, and that even dust or small stones brought thence and scattered among their cells drove the bees away from their honey. [5] This statement had been made long before by Solinus, and it was repeated with many additions and embellishments in later ages.

The monuments of the earlier inhabitants that remain, confirm in general the statement of the Roman historians, that they resembled the Britons in habits and manners. Their mode of burial seems to have been precisely the same, and this, combined with other circumstances, leads us to suppose that the religious rites of the people of the two islands bore a very close resemblance. In Ireland as in Britain,—the graves the

only constructions of the aboriginal inhabitants which have remained entire—consisted of a rough chamber or chambers of unhewn stones, covered with a lofty mound of earth or stones, the base of which was often surrounded with a circle of larger stones. In the central chamber or cist, the body was laid in full dress, accompanied with personal ornaments, weapons, or other articles, or if cremation had preceded the burial, the bones were placed in an urn, and similar articles were strewed on the floor. These monuments are of frequent occurrence in Ireland as well as in England, and they are often of enormous magnitude, as in the case of that at Newgrange, near Drogheda, in the county of Meath, and of two others in its immediate neighbourhood. It is far from improbable that Stonehenge, in England, was designed for an enormous sepulchral monument. In the numerous instances where the mound has, in the course of ages, been cleared away, and nothing but the central chamber and the external circle of stones is left standing, the former has received the name of a cromlech, and the latter that of a Druidical circle ; and antiquaries who trusted more to their imagination than to a careful comparison of facts, thought they had been temples and altars.

In one respect, the contents of the sepulchres of the ancient Irish seem to contradict the Roman authorities, inasmuch as they apparently testify a higher degree of cultivation than in Britain. In most cases, the Irish urns are better made and much more richly ornamented than the British urns. The personal ornaments are more numerous and of greater intrinsic value, and articles of gold are far more abundant. Their forms and ornamentation are, however, similar in character ; and we have other proofs that gold was found in Ireland in great abundance at a remote period. The immense quantity of gold found in the sepulchral mounds of the ancient Scythians, on the steppes of Russia, is no proof of the civilization of the people who were buried in them.

These various monuments of the arts among the early inhabitants of Ireland, are not found only in their graves, for they are dug up plentifully wherever land previously untouched is brought into cultivation, and they are obtained in great abundance from the beds of rivers, and from those peculiar characteristics of Ireland, the bogs. The gold ornaments consist chiefly of the torques, or collars for the neck, which appear to have been peculiar to the Celtic tribes, with fibulæ, bracelets, rings for the fingers, crescents, bullæ, ornamented plates of gold of different forms, &c. Swords, spear-heads, knives, axes, tools of different kinds, with basins and other vessels, are generally of bronze. Many weapons and tools, especially those formed like axes and hammers, to which the old antiquaries gave the name of celts, are found rudely made of hard stone. Among the most curious, and by far the most numerous, of the articles of gold, are those in the form of rings, or rather of half rings, which the Irish antiquaries have decided to be ring-money, and which, indeed, there seems reason for believing served the purpose of money, for the Irish appear to have had no coinage till a very late period. This ring-money is of different sizes, which we are assured are regulated by an exact proportion of weight. That rings of this kind were used instead of money as a circulating medium among the earlier tribes of western and northern Europe, we know from several sources ; [6] and we even find traces of it among the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons, in which kings, renowned for their liberality, are described as “ distributors of rings,” and their treasurers are the “ keepers of the hoards of rings.” The bulk of the Irish ring-money is of pure gold, though rare instances occur of rings of silver and copper. The bronze swords, which are leaf-shaped, and resemble those figured on many Greek and Roman monuments, and the spear-heads, are precisely identical with those found not unfrequently in England ; the

Irish antiquaries suppose them to be Phœnician, but it is quite as probable that they are of Roman or Romano-British manufacture.

Very little has yet been done towards arranging and classifying the antiquities of Ireland, and deducing from them results calculated to throw a light upon its history. Till within a few years they were so utterly neglected, that the gold ornaments generally found their way direct to the melting-pots, and those of bronze or stone, when found, were either thrown away, or kept by the superstitious peasantry as amulets. Several very valuable museums have now been formed, the finest of which is that of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. During the last few years, Irish antiquities have been collected with avidity ; but even now the most important circumstances connected with them are too often neglected, and it is considered sufficient to know that they were found in Ireland, without making a memorial of the exact spot and circumstances of their discovery. This neglect has deprived the articles themselves of a great portion of their value to the historian. It is necessary not only to classify these antiquities as Irish, but, as it is certain that Ireland was inhabited by different races, we require to have them classified according to the different districts in which they are found, and then, by minute comparison, we should probably be able to distinguish the characteristics of the different tribes at which the writers of antiquity hint, and to trace those peculiarities to the cognate tribes in other parts. As far as can be ascertained at present, the stone implements and articles resembling those found in Scandinavia and Germany are chiefly met with in the north of Ireland, throughout the province of Ulster, which we have every reason to suppose was peopled by a northern race. The richer articles of gold, the ring-money, and the more ornamental relics, are found chiefly in the south and south-west, and belonged probably to the Iverni and their cognate tribes. The gold itself was chiefly procured from the mountains of Wicklow. The antiquities found in the western districts, bordering on the Irish Channel, are of a more miscellaneous character, partaking of the character of those of the north and south. It was there, probably, that the intermixture of tribes began first, and was most extensive. [7]

The vagueness of everything connected with early Irish antiquities, and the impenetrable mystery in which the subject seems to be involved, has given room for the genius of archæologists to build up a host of theories into which it is by no means the object of the present work to enter. We know nothing, in fact, of the religion or polity of the ancient Irish, and can only suppose, from analogy, that they were the same, or nearly the same, as those of the Celtic tribes of western Europe, as we find them more or less imperfectly described by the writers of Greece and Rome. In the superstitions of the earlier ages of the world, the western extremities of the earth were looked upon with mystic reverence as possessing an especial degree of holiness, and as being the habitation of some of the sacred personages of the popular creed. To this feeling we owe the legends of the Hesperides, of the Atlantic Island of Plato, and a number of others of a similar description. This mysterious character of sanctity was of course carried further off, as geographical knowledge advanced, until at length Ireland, as the last distinctly known point, was regarded as the “ sacred island,” and then that character was moved still farther to some indefinite point which had no existence but in the popular imagination. This singular tendency of the popular belief continued to exist down to a late period, and we even find it influencing the minds of the contemporaries of Columbus, when he planned the discovery of the New World. Ireland is mentioned as “ the sacred island” in the writers of antiquity, and its south-eastern foreland retained the name of the Sacred Promontory, as we have already seen from Ptolemy’s geographical description, long after the Christian era. Whether there

was any other reason for such an appellation than the common religious belief of nearly the whole pagan world, we cannot now determine ; but there are certainly circumstances which might excite a suspicion that, in the migrations of tribes towards the west, Ireland may at last have become the principal seat of Celtic pagan-ism. But this and other questions must be left for discussion to the antiquary, while we hasten forward to a period of more authentic history ; previous to which, however, it is but right that we should glance rapidly over that long period of fabulous annals which occiipies so large a place in the native Irish Chronicles, and which has exercised an influence so profound on the poetry and popular legends of the Irish people.

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## II.

### Legendary Accounts of The First Peopling of Ireland.

AFTER Christianity had been firmly established among the different nations of western and northern Europe, and they had become acquainted with the history and mythology of Greece and Rome, as well as with the scriptural annals of the first migrations of mankind, they soon began to combine these with their own fables, in the desire to trace their particular descent from the common stock. It is to this tendency that we owe the British legend of the wanderings of Brute, and the Franks and Germans and Northerns created for themselves similar stories. The Irish, more imaginative than the others, were not content with one simple line of descent, but they laid claim to a number of different branches springing from the same parent stock, at different periods, and forming so many different and distinct colonies ; and mount-ing higher into antiquity, they place the first of these colonies some weeks before the Deluge, when a niece of Noah, whom the legend calls Cesara, is said to have led a colony to the Irish shores. Others say that three daughters of Cain had been there before her, with their husbands and a colony of beautiful ladies. All these, however, were swept away by the flood, which left the island as lonely and desolate as it had been before their arrival. [8]

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### Partholan and Nemedius.] History of Ireland. [Date Uncertain.

In this wild state it remained, according to the legend, three centuries, and then there came a colony from Migdonia in Greece, led by a chief named Partholan, of the family of Japhet, the ninth in descent from Noah. Partholan had been obliged to leave Greece on account of crimes into which his ambition had led him ; he sailed by Sicily, and along the coast of Spain, and landing on a Wednesday, the fourteenth day of May, at Inber-Sceine on the coast of Kerry, he fixed his residence on an island in the river Erne, in the province of Ulster. The legend gives the names of some of Partholan's principal followers, among whom were four " learned men," three Druids, the same number of generals, and two merchants. One of his followers, named Breagha, introduced the custom of duelling ; another, whose name was Beoir, " first promoted hospitality and good entertainment, and introduced the custom of feasting into the island ;" and on the occasion of his first feast, a third, named Samaliliath, invented the use of cups for the convenience of drinking ! Partholan, we are told, brought with him to Ireland his wife Dealgnait, three sons with their three wives, and a thousand soldiers. The lady Dealgnait, not long after their arrival, proved faithless to her



husband, who discovered an amour between her and a low servant of his household named Togha. Partholan expostulated with his wife on her conduct ; but she replied boldly and insolently, and the anger of the chief was roused beyond its usual limits. But it was not on the guilty lady or her paramour that he vented it ; a favourite greyhound of Dealgnait, called Samer, was standing by, and he seized it in his hand and dashed it to pieces against the ground. After this deed of blood, the dog was buried on the same spot in the island which Partholan had from the first chosen as his favourite residence, and which in memory of this event was ever afterwards known by the name of Inis-Samer. This, the Irish annalists tell us, was the “ first case of jealousy in Ireland.” The “ first man who died in Ireland,” was Feadha, the son of Tartan, seventeen years after the colony landed, and he was buried in a place called, from this circumstance, Magh-Feadha. Seven lakes burst forth in Ireland on the arrival of Partholan and his colony. He lived thirty years in Ireland, and after his death the island was divided between his four sons. His race lasted three hundred years, at the end of which period the whole population was swept away by a fearful pestilence, the ravages of which were most severely felt at the Hill of Howth, or, as it was then called, Ben-Heder, the northern promontory of the bay of Dublin.

Ireland was thus again left wild and uninhabited, and it remained so till about the time of the patriarch Jacob, when another scion of the family of Japhet, named Nemedius, the eleventh in descent from Noah, who, like Partholan, spoke the then universal language, Irish, left the shores of the Euxine sea with his four sons, and brought a new colony to people green Erin. The Nemedians were engaged during more than one generation in harassing wars, with a powerful tribe of African searovers, named Fomorians, who had established themselves in a strong-hold called the Tower of Conan, in an island on the coast of Ulster, named from it Tor-Inis, or the island of the Tower. At length the oppressed Nemedians rose against their enemies, took the tower by storm, and levelled it with the ground. But new hosts of Fomorians came to the assistance of their fellows, and the unfortunate Nemedians were reduced to a state little better than slavery. On one occasion, we are told, the whole forces of the two hostile peoples engaged in battle on the sea shore at low water, and after a savage combat, in which victory inclined to neither side and the slaughter was nearly equal, the tide gained upon them and surrounded them unperceived, and the few who escaped the sword and the spear, perished in the waves, with the exception of one individual who reached a boat in safety. A large party of the Nemedians fled from their victorious foes, and escaped in ships to Greece, where, instead of meeting with a hospitable welcome, they were reduced to a worse slavery than that which they had left behind them.

The wars between the Nemedians and the African pirates, and especially the storming of the Tower of Conan, were favourite subjects with the old Irish poets. It is not impossible that they may be founded on vague traditions of the early intercourse between the Phœnician traders and the inhabitants of Ierne.

When the Nemedians of Ireland had long groaned under the tyranny of their conquerors, at length, after a period of two hundred and seventeen years from the first landing of Nemedius, a party of the descendants of those of his race who had sought refuge in Greece, took again to the sea, and came to the relief of their brethren. This third colony is called by the Irish chroniclers the Fir-Bolgs. Their leader, who was named Dela, divided the island among his five sons, who thus founded five kingdoms, and placed a stone in the centre of the island at the point where their five kingdoms met. These were the first “ kings” who reigned in Ireland.

Scarcely forty years had elapsed from the establishment of these kingdoms, when another colony of the Nemedians of Greece, named by the chroniclers the Tuatha-de-Danaan, arrived on the Irish shores and deprived their predecessors of the sovereignty. The leader of this people was called Nuadh of the Silver-hand, from an artificial hand of silver substituted for one which he lost in battle subsequently to his arrival in Ireland. These Danaans, during their residence in Greece, had become extraordinary proficient in necromancy, and they carried their mysterious art to Norway and Denmark, where they first settled, and where they established several celebrated schools of magic. From Scandinavia they eventually sailed to Scotland, where they remained a few years, and then proceeded to Ireland. As they approached the shores of that island, they enveloped themselves in a mist by means of their incantations, under cover of which they landed secretly, and penetrated into the interior of the country as far as Sliabh-an-Iaruinn, or the Mountain of Iron, between the lakes of Allan and Erne, before the natives were aware of their presence. The latter made a speedy retreat into Connaught, closely followed by the invaders, who soon overtook them at Moytura, on the borders of Lake Masg. A decisive and sanguinary battle fought at this place, which was often celebrated by the minstrels of after ages under the title of the Battle of the Field of the Tower, ended in the complete discomfiture of the Fir-Bolgs, and rendered the Tuatha-de-Danaan sole masters of Ireland. The Fir-Bolgs fled to the Isle of Man, Arran, and the Hebrides.

The Tuatha-de-Danaan brought with them from Scandinavia, among other extraordinary things, three marvellous treasures, the Lia-Fail or Stone of Destiny, the Sorcerer's Spear, and the Magic Caldron, all celebrated in the old Irish romances. The Lia-Fail possessed the remarkable property of making a strange noise and becoming wonderfully disturbed, whenever a monarch of Ireland of pure blood was crowned, and a prophecy was attached to it that whatever country possessed it should be ruled over by a king of Irish descent, and enjoy uninterrupted success and prosperity. [9] It was preserved at Cashel, where the kings of Munster were crowned upon it. According to some writers it was afterwards kept at the Hill of Tara, where it remained until it was carried to Scotland by an Irish prince, who succeeded to the crown of that country. There it was preserved at Scone, until Edward I. carried it away into England, and placed it under the seat of the coronation chair of our kings, where it still remains.

Nine kings of the Tuatha-de-Danaan are said to have ruled in succession, during a period of nearly two hundred years, and then they were overcome by the last and most famous of these fabulous colonies, that of the Milesians or Scots, the history of which forms one of the wildest and most romantic stories of the early Irish annals. It was from this race that the Irish kings and chieftains of modern times claimed descent.

The outline of the story of the Milesians is as follows : after the flood, we are told, the population of the world, assembled to raise the Tower of Babel, was separated into seventy-two peoples, speaking so many different languages. Of these, the Scythians, descended from Gomer, settled in the North. Gomer's grandson, Feniusa Farsa, or Phenius, king of the Scythians, was a prince who applied himself to the study of letters, and he was anxious to make himself acquainted with all the seventy-two languages. With this object he sent out seventy-two learned men to reside seven years among the seventy-two different people who spoke them ; and on their return, he left his kingdom, having placed his son Nenuall on the throne as regent during his absence, and proceeded with these learned men to the plain of Shenaar, the scene of the dispersal, where this learned monarch founded a school or college of languages.

To this Phenius the Irish annalists ascribe the invention of the Ogham characters, or ancient Irish alphabet, and they tell us that in his college on the plain of Shenaar was cultivated the purest dialect of the Irish language, called the Bearla Feini.

While Phenius presided over his schools at Shenaar, his second son Niul was born, who was, as he grew up, instructed in all the languages of the world, and then Phenius returned to his kingdom and established schools there, over which he placed as president Gadel the son of Eathur. Phenius commanded this scholar to digest the Irish language into form and regulation, and to divide it into five several dialects : the first was the Finian dialect, spoken by the militia and soldiery ; the second, the poetical ; the third, the historical ; the fourth, the dialect of the physicians ; and the fifth, the common idiom, or vulgar Irish used in general by the people, which, after the name of Gadel the president, was named “ gaoidhealg.”

On the death of Phenius, his elder son succeeded to the throne, and Niul was left with no other riches than his learning, the fame of which however had reached the ears of the king of Egypt, who induced him to go thither to instruct the Egyptians, and who was so well satisfied with him that he gave him his daughter Scotia to wife. Their son was called Gadel, or Gadelas, in memory of his father’s friend, the president of the Scythian schools. After one or two generations, the descendants of Niul, having provoked the jealousy of the Egyptian monarch, were expelled, and took refuge in Crete, from whence, after a while, they again put to sea (for they had become great mariners) and returned to their ancient home in Scythia. They were however received by their kindred in a hostile manner, and after struggling seven years they took to their ships again, resolved to seek a home in some other land. After wandering about, in peril from storms and from hostile tribes, and uncertain whither ultimately to bend their course, they consulted their principal Druid, named Caicar, and he by his prophetic knowledge informed them, that there was no country ordained for them to inhabit, until they arrived on the coast of a certain island in the extreme west, but that they themselves would never set foot in that country, although it would be enjoyed by their posterity.

The Gadelians, as this people were now called from Gadelas the son of Niul, proceeded to a country which the Irish annals name Gothland, or the country of the Goths, where they settled temporarily, and remained, according to some versions of the legend, a hundred and fifty, according to others, three hundred years. They then proceeded to Spain, where, after long and sanguinary wars with the aboriginal inhabitants, the Gadelians attained to great power and influence. One of the most distinguished princes in the direct line from Niul was Breogan, who defeated the Spaniards in many battles, and built a city named after him Brigantia, and afterwards known by the name of Braganza. His grandson, named Milesius, collected his kinsmen and people and returned to Scythia, where by his great merits he became prime minister of the king. His popularity in the sequel excited the king’s jealousy, and he only escaped death by invading the palace with his faithful Gadelians, and slaughtering the king, and then, disgusted with the ingratitude of the Scythians, they retired to their fleet, and proceeded direct to the shores of Egypt, where Milesius soon gained so far on the affections of the Pharaoh, that he gave him his daughter in marriage, who, like the wife of Niul, bore the name of Scotia. After remaining seven years in Egypt, Milesius on a sudden called to mind the old prophecy of the Druid Caicar, and he again put to sea with his people, made direct for the West, entered the Atlantic Ocean, and after wandering we hardly understand where, landed at length in northern Spain, on the coast of the Bay of Biscay.

Spain, we are told, was at this time infested by the Goths, whom Milesius and his followers defeated in many battles, and thus became masters of nearly all the peninsula. At length a famine in the land, and the harassing life they led, continually exposed to the attacks of enemies, led them to think of seeking their fortunes elsewhere, and the principal persons of the family of Milesius, met in council, and they chose Ith the son of Breogan, a prince of great valour and discretion, to lead an expedition in search of the western island promised them in the ancient prophecy. Some say that Ith, before he started, went up to his observatory at the top of the highest tower of Brigantia, and thence, one starry winter's night before he set sail, obtained his first glimpse of Ireland through a powerful telescope ! Ith and his party landed on the northern coast of the island, and were rather astonished to find that the natives—who were the Tuatha-de-Danaan—talked Irish like themselves. They learnt from them that three kings then governed the island, that they were at that moment met together at a place called Oileach Neid on the confines of the province of Ulster, and that they were engaged in a quarrel about a number of jewels that were left them by their ancestors, which would in all probability be decided only by the sword. Ith marched with & hundred of his men to the spot, where he was well received by the three kings, who referred their dispute to his decision, and he succeeded in restoring confidence between them. But the three princes were no sooner reconciled than they became jealous of the strangers, and fearing that, allured by the richness of the country, they would be tempted to return with a force sufficient to conquer it, they determined to cut them off in their retreat. The result was a desperate battle, in which the Milesians were overpowered by numbers, and Ith was mortally wounded, but they succeeded in carrying their chief on shipboard, though he expired before they reached the coast of Spain. Milesius had died during their absence, but the princes of his family, enraged at the sight of the body of the slaughtered chieftain, determined to go to Ireland and revenge his death.

The Milesians accordingly sailed with thirty ships, and made their first attempt to land at Inber-Slainge on the northern coast of Leinster, now Wexford Harbour. Here they were defeated by the incantations of the Tuatha-de-Danaan, who by their diabolical arts threw a cloud over the whole island, which so confused the invaders, that they thought they saw nothing but the resemblance of a hog. They then left this spot to seek a more favourable coast, and proceeded to the coast of Munster, where they effected a landing at Inber-Sceine, now Bantry-Bay. The Irish chronologists have ascertained that this event happened on Thursday, the first day of May, in the year of the world 2934. Marching into the country, they encountered successively the three wives of the Irish chieftains, with troops of beautiful ladies and Druids, and at length they arrived at the royal palace of Teamair, where it was arranged that the Milesians should first return to their ships, on the agreement that if they could force a landing in despite of the older inhabitants, the latter should, without further opposition, surrender to them the sovereignty of the island. The Tuatha-de-Danaan indeed depended more for protection on their enchantments than on their valour, and no sooner were the Milesians on board than they conjured up a tempest that nearly destroyed the whole fleet. After much loss : and damage, the remains of the naval armament was again assembled, and made good a landing in the old harbour of Inber-Sceine. They marched thence to the mountain of Sliabh-Mis, where was fought the great and decisive battle, so often celebrated by the bards of later times, which secured to the Milesians the conquest of Ireland. Among the slain were several of the Milesian as well as of the native princesses, with many of their beautiful ladies, who seem to have taken a very unfeminine part in these actions ; the spot where each fell was in later

times pointed out by the memorial stones, grey with age, which were said to stand over them. Another action followed, in which the Milesians were again victorious, and the three princes of the island were slain. The conquerors now seized upon the country, which was divided between the two leaders of the expedition, Heber and Heremon, the latter taking the northern portion of the island, and the other the south. The only dispute between the two princes in the division of their people, is said to have arisen from a very skilful musician named O-Naoi, and an eminent poet named Cir-Mac-Cis, who had accompanied the expedition from Spain, and whom each of the chieftains desired to possess in his kingdom. At length it was determined to decide the question by lots, and in the end the musician fell to the share of Heber, and the poet to Heremon. The old Irish antiquaries tell us that, from this circumstance, the southern part of the island, over which Heber ruled, has ever since been more celebrated for its musicians than the north.

For a year there was peace between the two brothers, and then strife was stirred up by the jealousy of a woman. The three most fruitful valleys in Ireland were Druim Clasach, Druim Beathach, and Druim Finghin. Two of these belonged to Heber. His wife was a princess of great pride and ambition, and she envied the queen of Heremon the possession of the other fruitful valley. After repeatedly urging her husband to lay claim to it, and obtain it by force of arms, she at length declared positively that she would never sleep in his bed again until he had made her queen of the three fruitful valleys of Ireland. Heber, thus instigated, took up arms against his brother, and was defeated and slain in a great battle in the plain of Geisiol, in Leinster. In consequence of this event, Heremon became sole monarch of Ireland.

Heremon was followed, after his death, by a long succession of princes, whose histories are as fabulous as his own, and who are not deserving of a detailed notice. In the reign of Tighermas, the sixth in succession from him, we are told that the first gold-mine was discovered near Liffey ; and we learn from Keating that “ in his time likewise the colours of blue and green were invented, and the people began to be more polite in their habits, and set off their dress with various ornaments.” This prince, it is added, established a law throughout his dominions, that the quality of every person should be known by his garb ; the dress of a slave was to be of one colour ; that of a soldier of two ; a commanding officer was permitted to wear three colours ; the garb of a gentleman who kept hospitable tables for the entertainment of strangers, was to be of four colours ; five colours distinguished the nobility ; the king, queen, and other members of the royal family, were confined to six ; and historians and persons of eminent learning were permitted to wear the same number of colours as the king.

Ollamh Fodhla, (Fodhla the sage) who lived, according to the poets, somewhat less than two hundred years after the king last mentioned, but who is placed by those historians who believe in his existence at a much shorter distance before the Christian era, was the Alfred of early Irish history. One of the most important acts said to have shed lustre on the reign of this monarch, was the establishment of the great triennial parliament or convention at Tara, at which the leading persons of the three orders of society, the monarch, the druids, and the people, were called together for the purpose of deliberating on public affairs, and passing laws. At these meetings, also, we are told that the historical records of the kingdom were revised, carefully examined, and corrected, and the result entered in the great national register called the Psalter of Tara, which is supposed to have been destroyed at the period of the Norman invasion. The native historians of Ireland refer back in triumph to this book, as containing the authentic records of Irish history from a period more remote by many centuries than

the Christian era, and it is supposed that part of the contents of the Psalter of Cashel, which contains much of the fabulous history of the Irish, was copied from it. It was, perhaps, a mere collection of bardic poems. The great legislator, Ollamh Fodhla, is said also to have established the usage which made employments and offices hereditary in families. The most important offices thus transmitted, were those of heralds, physicians, bards, and musicians, to each of which professions he assigned lands for their use ; and he instituted a great school at Tara, which became afterwards celebrated under the name of Mur-ollamham, or the college of the learned. The parliament of Tara was called in Irish the Feis-teamhrach, or general assembly.

[1] The words of the satirist are,

Arma quidem ultra  
Litora Juvernæ promovimus, et modo captas  
Orcadas, ac minima contentos nocte Britannos.—  
*Juvenal*, Sat. II. v. 159.

[2] The best commentary on Ptolemy's Geography of Ireland, is that by Konrad Mannert, *Geographic der Griechen und Romer* ; *Britannia*, pp. 216, 229.

[3] Eblana and the Oboca are believed by some antiquaries to be Dublin and the modern Avoca, but in this case it will be necessary to suppose that Ptolemy has made a confusion in his latitudes and longitudes, which is not easily explained. I have chiefly followed Maunert.

[4] Claudian, who wrote a poetical panegyric on this war, says of the Roman commander, in one passage :

Nec falso nomine Pictos  
Edomuit, Scotumque vago mucrone secutus,  
Fregit Hyperboreas remis audacibus undas.

And in another passage the same poet describes thus the result of the war:

Maduerunt Saxone fuso  
Arcades, incaluit Pictorum sanguine Thule,  
Scotorum cumulos flevit glacialis Ierne.

[5] Isidor. *Hisp. Orig. lib. ix.*, c. 12.

[6] Ring-money, closely resembling in form that of the ancient Irish, is actually made at the present day in Birmingham, for exportation to Africa, where it circulates among the natives.

[7] This general notion of the light thrown on the ethnography of ancient Ireland by the distribution of its antiquities, is founded chiefly on the information given me by Mr. Crofton Croker, who has formed a remarkably interesting private museum of Irish antiquities, and who has studied them with more care than any other antiquary with whom I am acquainted.

[8] It would be only throwing away time to examine critically fables like those contained in the present and following chapter, and which are here chiefly taken from Keating. They are important merely as they form the foundation of so much of Irish legend and poetry. The period at which they were invented extended probably from the tenth to the twelfth century. One of the great authorities for these legends is the celebrated Psalter of Cashel.

[9] The properties of this celebrated stone were thur described in two Leonine verses,—

Ni fallat fatum, Scoti quocunque locatum

Invenient lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem.

It seems to be the opinion of some modern antiquaries that a pillar stone still remaining at the Hill of Tara is the true Lia-Fail, which in that case was not carried to Scotland.

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